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MODERN ARMENIAN LITERATURE AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY FROM 1700 TO 1915

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The Armenian intellectual revival in modern times was a complex process extending over 150 years, from 1700 to 1850. It entailed not only the enlightenment of a nation plunged into ignorance during three centuries of servitude, but also its political liberation from Turkish and Persian rule.

Beginnings of the Revival in the Ottoman Empire

The first phase of the Armenian revival covers the period from 1700 to 1800 and is characterized by the slow emergence of a native intelligentsia and by the establishment of certain social and cultural infrastructures. The second phase of fifty years is marked by numerous foreign contacts, increased social conflicts, and the speeding up of the cultural life in the major urban centers. Already in the seventeenth century seeds of impending change and conflict appeared in the form of bridgeheads of Catholic penetration into the Ottoman Empire. Jesuit missionaries

ing printing presses, publishing books, and funding students. Then there were the *mahdesis* (meaning "pilgrims" in Arabic), who were highly respected by the Armenians for their saintly lifestyle and devotion to religion. So were the more worldly *aghas* (Turkish for "landlords" or "lords"), who were respected because of their wealth, age, and wisdom. Another class that wielded authority was made up of the *badvelis* (Armenian for "teachers" or "preachers"), mostly church-trained lay teachers whose vast erudition, especially in religious matters, gave them a venerable position in society. Finally there were the *khodjas* (meaning in Persian "masters"), the rivals of the *amiras* and *chelebis*. They formed an entrepreneurial class of wealthy, enterprising merchants on a global scale but who were especially active in Persia and India as well as in the internal and external commerce of the Ottoman Empire during the seventeenth and part of the eighteenth century.

The clergy was the last element of the cultural elite of the period. Traditionally, the clergy had been the most educated element of the Armenian population. It allied itself with the lay intelligentsia and formed the ruling class, with the patriarch at its head. This array of men of letters, of wealth, and of fanatical fervor was formed slowly in the two centuries of the revival, and it counteracted the threat posed by the advent of first the Catholic then the Protestant missionaries into the Ottoman Empire.

Parallel to the awakening of cultural interest, in the seventeenth century there was a sudden surge of national liberation activity thanks to the vigorous initiatives of Israel Ori, a native of Armenia born in 1659 into an aristocratic family. As a young man, Ori was driven by the obsession of enlisting European powers in a concerted military adventure to liberate Eastern Armenia from Persian domination and to create an independent state. He failed, but his indomitable will and his constant travels helped create a psychological climate in the Armenian ruling classes that favored more openness to the West.

Except for the works of Eremia Chelebi Kiumurjian, there was very little literary activity in the Armenian world during the seventeenth century. Backwardness and the humiliating status of *raya* (chattel) had almost stifled the Armenians' creative energies. Only a score of books, all of a religious nature, saw the light of day. However, a certain tradition of popular lyrical poetry as well as troubadour poetry did survive, kept alive by its sheer momentum.

The Age of Enlightenment

The eighteenth century may be labeled the "Age of Enlightenment" in the Armenian world. It was characterized by the slow but steady emergence of a middle class in the major cities, bringing in its wake the need for better public education, for mass media, and eventually for power. The traditional ruling classes—the *amiras*, the *khodjas*, and the *chelebis*, in concert with the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople, whom they controlled, consolidated their hold over the community through greater and more frequent acts of public benevolence. No less important were the cultural initiatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church and of the Armenian Catholic Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice, founded by Mekhitar of Sebastia in 1717.

What makes this elite remarkable is the fact that it was committed to the preservation of the traditional culture, to the faith and the language of its forefathers, and to the survival of the Armenian nation. Although the *amiras*, *khodjas*, and *chelebis* retained their dominance for generations, they had no concerted impact on the revival. Their activities were erratic and discontinuous, and they often neutralized one another. Thus, in spite of their altruism and patriotism, these groups constituted a powerful force of conservatism and restraint in the path of ambitious and daring intellectuals, especially in the nineteenth century. Allied to the Armenian Church, they exercised a fly wheel action, propelling and restraining the revival at the same time.

Modern Armenian culture is an essentially urban phenomenon and has flowered in large cities at the periphery of the Armenian world, at the points of contact with foreign cultures—with English culture in Madras and Calcutta; with French culture, in Smyrna, Constantinople, and Paris; with Italian culture, in Venice; with German culture in Dorpat (now Tartu, Estonia), and Vienna; with Russian culture, in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Tiflis. This fact gives modern Armenian culture a somewhat cosmopolitan character, provoking inner tensions that other cultures, developing within their own and stable national structures, do not experience.

The absence of national political life for over 400 years has developed strong centrifugal and individualistic tendencies among Armenians and has given rise to an incipient xenophilia that has been the major cause of a permanent desire to emulate Western cultural models, resulting in certain "alienation" of the ethnic literature. All this has fostered a permanent state of tension within Armenian life, giving rise

to class conflicts and religious and denominational dissensions. The gradual separation of the nation, beginning in 1800, into two divergent eastern and western parts and the much larger context of racial antagonism between Turks and Armenians have kept the Armenians, especially the elites, in a constant state of alertness and anxiety. These anxieties have created a centripetal reflex and craving for a closed social life, for unity and isolation. The final constant of Armenian cultural life has been the ideology of absolute priority of the group's interests over those of the individual, an imperative to which all else—artistic demands and experimentation, individual rights, freedom of expression, and dissent—have been subordinated.

For the Western Armenians, the eighteenth century opened with the founding the Benedictine Order of Mekhitarists in 1717 on the island of San Lazzaro in Venice, dedicated to piety, literary scholarship, and service to the nation. The founder was a young priest, Mekhitar (1676-1749), born in Sebastia. After taking the orders as a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Constantinople, Mekhitar was converted to Catholicism and organized a small group of disciples. Predictably, this action drew the ire of the Apostolic Church. Unable to withstand the church's harassment, Mekhitar took refuge in Venice, to pursue in freedom his religious devotion and his mission of enlightenment. To this end, he decided that the first priority was the forging of an effective instrument by which the Armenian masses could be enlightened. Because the *ashkharhabar*, or the language of the people, was a hopelessly inefficient and unreliable tool for that purpose, Mekhitar felt that he had to write a complete and definitive grammar of the Armenian language. Thus, in 1727 he published the first volume of the *Grammar in Armeno-Turkish* (the manuscript of the second volume is still in Venice), followed three years later by a grammar of *grabar* (krapar), or classical Armenian. But the major contribution of the indefatigable monk to Armenian scholarship is his celebrated *Bargirk Haikazian Lezvi* (Dictionary of the Armenian Language). Published in 1749, three weeks after his death, it contained 100,000 items and took twenty-five years to complete. For a long time both works were the basic tools used by scholarly researchers who published classical Armenian texts, popularized of Armenian history, restored the linguistic structure of the Armenian language, and translated Greek, Latin, and European masterpieces. Perhaps more important was the example of total dedication Mekhitar inspired in his disciples and the spiritual vigor with which he imbued them for generations to come. It was through the dedication of his

followers that Mekhitar achieved his triple goal of preparing Catholic priests of deep religious devotion, accomplished scholars, and highly motivated patriots.

At the same time, the clergy of the Apostolic Church in Constantinople also set itself the task of modernizing the infrastructure of the national culture. Between 1700 and 1710 four new printing presses were founded in Constantinople and forty volumes of books were published, almost all of a religious nature. The driving force of this sudden surge of activity was Hovhannes of Baghesh, otherwise known as Archbishop Golod. Elected patriarch of Constantinople in 1705, he threw himself body and soul into the task of easing the vicious denominational conflicts that had been ravaging the Armenian *millet* for over fifty years. But he made little headway. He also commissioned the translation of some twenty volumes of Latin and Italian books on religious topics. During his tenure of thirty-six years, Golod published more than ninety volumes, founded two seminaries, and trained and ordained forty priests. The boost he gave to learning was continued by his student and successor, Patriarch Hagop Nalian, an even more passionate apostle of modernization. He authored ten volumes of religious instruction and interpretation of religious texts. As a theologian, linguist, and author, Nalian ranks with the most illustrious patriarchs, and although his work bears no comparison with the lasting and worldwide effects of Mekhitar's, he nonetheless played a key role in consolidating the authority of the Apostolic Church at a crucial time in its history.

On the strictly literary plane, the first half of the eighteenth century produced no less than thirty poet-versifiers writing in classical or vernacular Armenian or even in Turkish. Many of these were patriarchs. The annals of the period are rich in men of letters of all sorts, such as Baghdasar Tbir (1683-1768) of Constantinople, poet, musician, historian, scientist, educator, Enlightenment activist, author of three books on Armenian grammar (which were used in Armenian schools for over 100 years) a book of lyrics, and a treatise on logic, and editor of more than ten manuscripts of major medieval Armenian authors. There were also historiographers, translators of Italian and Latin texts, interpreters (polyglot Armenians who worked in foreign consulates as translators), linguists, and versifiers. It was, all in all, a dynamic period for the newly forming middle class in the cities, the future *esnafs*, or guildsmen, who controlled much of the inner commercial market in Constantinople. Around this time, in 1750, the Great Khan of Constantinople was built,

a vast three-storied commercial complex with 166 rooms from where the *amiras* and the Armenian merchants conducted their affairs.

This was a time of construction of churches and monasteries, financed largely by the *amiras*, who consolidated their power over the church and the community. By the middle of the eighteenth century, ten printing presses functioned in the capital, but only religious books were published; it would be another ninety years before the periodic press appeared. Two kinds of schools for public instruction existed—one had the classes in the Great Khan for the training of trade apprentices, and the other took place in the small rooms adjacent to the churches where priests taught religion to neighborhood children as well as reading and writing. Only in 1789 were minorities in the Ottoman Empire given the right to open their own schools. But this short period of cultural activity was followed by many years of lethargy until the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The Revival in the Communities in India

In the East, the hopes and struggles for national liberation had always been more active. Prominent among the eighteenth-century intelligentsia was Joseph Emin. He deployed immense energy in trying in vain to interest the British government, the Armenian catholicos, and then the Georgian king in his plans to create a sovereign Armenia. In 1792 he published in London his autobiography, *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, an Armenian*, in which he expounded his ideas about the liberation of the Armenian nation from Oriental tyranny through education and armed struggle. It was with him that the Enlightenment theories that man is born free and obeys only the natural laws of reason penetrated into Armenian political consciousness and influenced the ideology of the period.

The centers of this consciousness were the Armenian communities in India, of Madras and Calcutta, established at the beginning of the eighteenth century as a result of massive emigration from the region of New Julfa (Nor Chougha; Isfahan) in Persia. Close commercial relations with the British through the East India company had brought prosperity to the Armenians and had awakened them culturally. In 1772 a printing press began to function in Madras, another one in Calcutta in 1796, as an elite group of intellectuals calling themselves "the Madras Group" came into being in the early 1770s. Soon the ideology of the national

liberation movement that had been developing for two centuries took shape in the works of the leading intellectuals. Movses Baghramian's *Nor Tetrak vor Kochi Hortorak* (New Booklet of Exhortations) in 1772 (which Leo considers the foundation of Armenian political literature) advocated armed struggle against the oppressors and exhorted the Armenians to open up to the ideas of Western Enlightenment and to work toward national self-consciousness so that the ideology of the national liberation struggle could strike root. Shahamir Shahamirian (1723-1797) is the author of two important books—*Girk Anvanial Vorokait Parats* (Snare of Glory) in 1773 and *Tetrak vor Kochi Nshavak* (Booklet of Aim) published in 1783. The first laid down the social and economic structures of the future free Armenia, which Shahamirian imagined to be a republic with a parliament freely chosen by the people and endowed by a constitution that would guarantee the rights and duties of the various governing bodies and citizens and institute the separation of church and state. In *Aim*, Shahamirian writes about the ideal communal constitution for the Armenians in Madras. Both books are animated by the vision of a double liberation of the Armenians—first from ignorance through education and enlightenment that prepares the ground for the second liberation, this time from political slavery through armed struggle. They further envision the general form of the future free and sovereign Armenia, its legal system and constitutional structures, the separation of church and state, and the republican framework chosen through universal suffrage. The small Madras community of only 1,000 Armenians also boasted a highly enlightened and wealthy upper middle class that financed the publication of these and other books and their diffusion in the Armenian world, the founding of schools, and the work of the Mekhitarists in faraway Venice and Trieste. Finally, these same wealthy merchants decided to enrich the colony with a newspaper. So in 1794 an educated priest, Father Harutiun Shmavonian, was brought to Madras from Persia to edit and publish the first periodical publication in the Armenian world, *Aztarar* (The Monitor). The journal published commercial news and general information about the Armenian colonies in the world but was forced to cease publication after eighteen issues.

By the turn of the century, the Armenian community in Madras had lived out its brief existence. It was the turn of the Calcutta community to carry the torch. A printing press was founded in 1797, the following year a school was opened, and ten years later a second press was founded. Books began to be published, and in 1818 the first journal, the weekly *Hayeli Kalkatian* (Mirror of Calcutta) appeared, almost

exclusively in classical Armenian, to please the highly conservative community.

Gradually the revival gathered speed. Other journals were published and European authors, such as William Shakespeare, René de Chateaubriand, Samuel Johnson, and others were translated. In 1821 an important step was taken when the first Armenian college, the Philanthropic College (Mardasirakan Jemaran) was opened in Calcutta. The following year a printing press was added, and four years later a library was opened. The college became a hub of cultural activity around the imposing figure of its principal for forty years, Hovhannes Avdalian (1793-1860). Originally from Persia, Avdalian had acquired an impeccable English education and specialized in education and philology. He became the leading intellectual of the entire epoch, training a whole generation of teachers and men of letters who played an important role in the growth of the spirit of the revival.

But with prosperity and culture, a certain decadence had set in. Mixed marriages, neglect and disuse of the Armenian language, weakening of traditions, and assimilation within English society had contributed to the decline of the Armenian community in Calcutta. It was at this moment, in 1839, that an intellectual from Persia, Mesrob Taghiatians, entered the scene. A heady young man with an English education, he saw his literary function as that of a popularizer of other cultures and an educator of the masses. He first translated English historical works; then edited the journal *Azgaser* (The Patriot) of the Ararat Association, which he helped found; wrote poetry and essays; and worked as a teacher. Then in 1846 he published the first of his three historical novels inspired by ancient Armenian literature, *Vep Vardgesi* (The Epic Novel of Vardges), the first work of fiction in modern Armenian literature. Partly historical and partly psychological, its style and tone were heavily influenced by European preromanticism and many English authors. (Taghiatians had translated works by Shakespeare, John Milton, Daniel Defoe, and Sir Water Scott.) Artistically speaking, Taghiatians's novels were rather crude, but their didactic and pseudorealist style seems to have set the tone for most of the novels that were to follow in the coming century.

After 1850, the Armenian community of Calcutta, like the other communities in India, declined and, by the year 1900, ceased to count in the Armenian world. Yet these communities played an important role in the nineteenth-century revival in both the Eastern and Western Armenian world through their close contacts with the Mekhitarist

congregations in Venice and Trieste, which they supported financially out of love for the national culture.

The Revival of the Eastern Armenians

The revival of the Eastern Armenians was much slower than that of the Western Armenians. It started in the mid-eighteenth century with the appearance of an exceptionally gifted poet minstrel, Sayat Nova (1712-1795), who was born in Aleppo but lived and produced in Tiflis. Artistically, Sayat Nova was certainly the most accomplished minstrel of the some 400 others in the region in his time, and he gave an important impetus to the popular lyrical poetry. But his was an oral tradition, and its impact was not very great in the urban centers.

In the eighteenth century, Eastern Armenian society was made up of a largely rural population in Armenia itself and an urban mass in cities outside Armenia proper, such as Tiflis, Baku, and Batum, whose prosperity increased with the growth of commerce and industrialization of the Caucasus. Armenian businessmen and educated people with European connections were also instrumental in transmitting new social ideas and commercial know-how to the population. At the same time, an intelligentsia radicalized through contacts with Russian culture emerged from the middle and lower-middle classes, drawing the cities and countryside closer. Thus, during the nineteenth century, traditional rural society was gradually enlightened and transformed, and a sense of nationality of secular nature developed among the Armenians. Many Armenians had settled in Moscow or St. Petersburg either as businessmen or as students and lived in small, closed communities. Tiflis was another important cultural center for Armenians. The remoteness and the sorry plight of the homeland moved the hearts of these expatriates and turned some, especially the students, into cultural activists. Out of this ferment the first signs of a renaissance appeared.

The first stirring occurred in communities far away from the homeland, as was the case with the Western Armenians. In 1780 a printing press was opened in St. Petersburg, and some classical Armenian texts were published. The opening of a school in Astrakhan in 1810 marked the start of an educational activity that would increase as the renaissance developed. Soon the fame of the school and that of its principal, Serovbe Patkanian, spread far and wide, setting an example to others. In 1815 an event of major consequence took place

in Moscow: the opening of the prestigious Lazarian College, or Academy (Jemaran), founded by the Lazarian family, a veritable dynasty of wealthy, enlightened Armenian businessmen from New Julfa. The family also had distinguished itself in the Russian armies during the Armenian liberation struggles and was a great patron of education. Very soon the Lazarian Academy became an important center of learning (it existed until it was seized by the Bolsheviks in 1918) with the full program of a Russian gymnasium, under the able leadership of Harutium Alamdarian. By 1850 the academic syllabus of the college had a markedly Orientalist and Armenological direction with an elite majority of Armenian teachers and students from all over Russia. Many of them, poets, intellectuals, and leaders, would soon spearhead the cultural renaissance in Russian, or Eastern, Armenia. In 1836 its library holdings numbered 8,000 volumes, its press published books in thirteen different languages, and it became the first point of contact of Armenian intelligentsia with the modern world.

In 1824, fifteen years after the founding of the Lazarian College, another important center of learning, the Nersisian College, began in Tiflis, at the other end of the Russian Empire. Lasting one hundred years, it was the work of Nerses Ashtaraketsi (1770-1857), prelate of the Armenians of Tiflis (he became catholicos in 1843), a leading figure in the national liberation struggle of the Armenians. Like the Lazarian College, Nersisian College counted among its students and faculty some of the most liberal-minded political activists, poets, and writers of the time, such as Khachatur Abovian, Stepan Nazarian, and Harutium Alamdarian. These two institutions taught the Armenians what Western education meant and gave birth to a class of true intellectuals.

Printing presses and publications continued apace with education. In 1821 a press started to function in Moscow, then in Tiflis in 1826, where Father Mikayel Chamchian's *Grammar of the Armenian Language* was published. In 1827 a press was set up in Shushi. In 1828 a book of archives was published in St. Petersburg. That same year students of the Nersisian College published, under the guidance of Alamdarian, a book of poetry. The following year a press was founded in the Lazarian College, which published a collection of student poetry called *Musaik Araratian* (Muses of Ararat). In 1829 the Treaty of Adrianople between Russia and Turkey inaugurated a period of peace for the Armenians during which the cultural progress gathered momentum. During the next decade the Armenian theater took its first steps in Nor Nakhichevan, Tiflis, and Shamakhi. And when in 1834

Sargis Tigranian published in Moscow a grabar translation of Racine's *Athalie*, he gave the first sign of the coming of classicism into Russian Armenian letters.

Fifty years later, in 1874, a third college, Gevorgian Jemaran, was founded by Catholicos Gevorg IV of Echmiadzin. At first it was dedicated to the training of teachers and the preparation of students for the priesthood, but gradually its religious character weakened and it became almost equivalent to a lay college with a strong accent on Armenian scholarship. Later in the century the college became a hotbed for political activism.

One last center of learning that played an important role in the renaissance was the German University of Dorpat. In the 1830s a group of Armenian students from Russian Armenia had gone there to pursue humanistic studies. In this academic environment these students—writers, poets, musicians—felt the powerful impact of the romantic poetry of Johann Goethe and Johann Schiller as well as the shock waves of the 1830 Revolution in Paris. They were fired up with nationalist fervor, with the ideals of the Enlightenment, and the revolutionary spirit of the times. They wrote passionate poetry about the woes and hopes of Armenia, set it to music, and sang it.

The period between 1830 and 1850 was a time of great excitement and challenge. Scores of schools were opened under the influence of the Mekhitarists from the West and of the newspapers and ideas that reached from Madras and Calcutta from the East. The enlightened class soon realized the urgency of educating and upgrading the masses. Liberation of the homeland would come later. And to do all this, they needed effective means of communication—a language and a forum. Thus the first steps in forging a new literary *ashkharhabar* were taken in the Lazarian and Nersisian colleges, where teachers actively studied the dialects of the students from various regions of Armenia, then purified them of foreign borrowings and gradually developed a common language understandable by all. By 1846 Stepan Nazarian had written a book in defense of the new literary *ashkharhabar*, declaring that the dialect of the Ararat district should serve as the basis for the future language. This started a polemic that continued until 1855 with the publication of Rafayel Patkanian's (he used the pseudonym Kamar-Katipa) poetry in *ashkharhabar*, which assured that form's final victory. By 1850 students in Dorpat were singing their patriotic songs in *ashkharhabar*.

Other men of letters also were aiming at the enlightenment of the Armenian people from the 1830s to 1850s. Several travelogues were

published in Venice, Calcutta, and Tiflis, as were some novels and tales of mainly moralistic nature. Memorialist and autobiographical literature, too, developed rapidly. Other important figures were Harutiun Araratian, Father Manvel Gumushkhanetsi and Khachatur Abovian. There was a revival in other genres, too. Books of parables, moralistic tales, and novels were published in Smyrna, Constantinople, and Moscow, and popular ballads dedicated to Armenian heroes of Russo-Turkish wars.

The Western Armenian Revival

Among the Western Armenians, things began to fall into place in the 1840s. Politically, the hopes aroused by the tanzimat proclamation of Sultan Abdul-Mejid in 1839, promising reforms for the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire, were still very much alive. Culturally, the revival seemed to be gathering pace. Some thirty-seven schools, including two colleges, with 4,620 students, were operating in Constantinople; several museums, printing presses, hospitals, and public libraries were functioning; and eight different journals were published. Between 1843 and 1848 some thirty promising students were sent to European, mainly French, universities for higher education paid for by the *amiras* and some wealthy middle-classes. Also, in 1843 the Mekhitarists of Venice began publishing the first scholarly periodical, *Pazmavep* (Polyhistory), while in 1847, their counterparts in Vienna began to publish *Evropa* (Europe), a literary and scholarly journal in almost faultless literary Armenian. At the same time, the patriarch of Constantinople founded its own journal called *Hayastan*, a symbol of its intellectual and social authority. In 1847, the Protestant community was officially recognized by the Ottoman government.

By 1850 an intelligentsia had gradually taken shape, made up first by a group of Westernized, highly motivated and professional young people. They represented the best minds of the time—Nahabed Rusinian, the daring innovator in the field of linguistics; Krikor Odian, jurist, writer, humanist, and the driving force behind the Ottoman Constitution of 1878 and the Armenian National Constitution of 1863; Stepan Vosganian, already mentioned; Khachatur Misakian, the erudite linguist and writer, and Hovhannes Hisarian, the editor, writer, and archaeologist-ethnographer. Then there were the brothers Mgrdich and Krikor Aghaton, the first an editor, jurist, and political figure in the Ottoman

administration, and the second an internationally noted agronomist, economist, editor, and high civil servant in the Ottoman administration; Nigoghos Zorayan, the economist, political scientist, and free thinker; Garabed Utudjian, the agronomist and editor; and others, almost all university graduates from Paris.

The second group of the intelligentsia was the previously mentioned *amiras*. Many of the *amira* families (in the eighteenth century their number had reached 150) held hereditary positions of great responsibility in the royal palace which they often used for the benefit of their community. Of these families (such as the Dadian, Duzian, and Bezdjian), none was so famous as the Balian, the prestigious architects to the sultan for more than a century and a veritable dynasty. Two of the Balian, the brothers Nigoghos and Hagop, both graduates of the University of Paris, took an active part in community affairs by supporting and financing theaters, schools, and other cultural projects in the capital, especially Hagop, whose house became the meeting place for the cultural elite.

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the preparatory phase of modern Armenian literature appeared to be complete. Several important developments had occurred. A start had been made in structuring a tolerably well-made and polished literary language; and frequent contacts with advanced cultures (English in India, Russian and German in Eastern Armenia, French in the Ottoman Empire and in Europe, Italian and classical in Venice) had brought a sense of progress and activated critical thinking. Also, an intelligentsia of sorts and an elite had asserted themselves; some elements of a literary tradition in prose, verse, and journalism were in place; and a middle class had begun to take shape in the big urban centers. Finally, Eastern Armenia had passed under Russian rule, but the liberation of Western Armenia from the Ottomans was no more than an idea in some minds.

The first literary texts in the West were in grabar as the authors were men of religion. After the books of Taghiatians, the most important event was the publication in Constantinople, in 1850, of the poetry of Father Mgrdich (Mkrtich) Khrimian (1820-1907) entitled *Hravirak Ayraratian* (Invitation to Ararat), which was fashioned after the classical model of Virgil's *Pastoral Poems*. But Khrimian was also a spontaneous, elementary writer whose words sprang from deep, hidden sources of Armenianness; from love and understanding of the land, its traditions, and the peasants' feelings. His book, an exhortation to love the land and to liberate it from oppression, had a tremendous impact on the minds of

the enlightened people. The following year a volume of poems by Father Edvard Hurmuzian (1799-1876), entitled *Purastank* (Flower Gardens) and inspired by Virgil's poetry, appeared from the Mekhitarist Congregation press in Venice. The poems lacked solid poetic qualities but they established the presence of classicism in Armenian letters. By the 1830s the classical taste also had penetrated into the Mekhitarist sensibility, thanks to massive translations of the ancients as well as through poems by eminent scholars and poets of the congregation. The dominant figure in Armenian classicism was Father Arsen Pakraduni (Bagratuni) (1790-1866) whose *Haik Diutsazn* (Haik the Hero) is the masterpiece of the epic genre in Armenian letters. It is also one of the longest epics in world literature (22,332 lines), glorifying the patriotic spirit within the context of Christian ethics and the Old Testament, in the purest classical tradition of Tasso, Virgil, and Homer. But the real theoretician of Armenian classicism was Father Edvard Hurmuzian, whose *Ardzern Banasteghsutun* (Handbook of Poetry), published in Venice in 1839 is the first attempt to make a theoretical study in aesthetics, that of classicism, in Armenian. Armenian classicism, almost exclusively confined to the Mekhitarists and their students, was concerned with two main themes. One was the national ethos—the unending struggle for national liberation, the heroic and glorious past of Armenia, the beauty of the motherland, the mythic figure of Haik (Haig) the ancestor, and the virtues of Haikanush, his wife. The other was the general aesthetic issues of classicism, such as the sense of order and harmony, the respect for rationality, the edifying nature of poetry, the choice of noble sentiments and heroes, the epic breath, and the role of the supernatural in the destiny of the Armenian people. But the scope and duration of the school was severely restricted by writers' use of the grabar as the only dignified language worthy of classical texts and also the mythic nature of the content. In any case, hardly anyone of importance outside the Mekhitarist sphere of influence ever tried to write in the classical vein.

First Signs of Revival—The Mekhitarists and Smyrna

While the rise and fall of the Indian communities was taking place, the Mekhitarist world had moved forward. In the second half of the eighteenth century, a new and more prepared generation of scholars trained in the spirit and discipline of Mekhitar of Sebastia entered the scene. First on the list of priorities was the perfecting of grabar by translating

classical texts into Armenian and then by arduously purifying and renewing the grammar. The *Nor Haikazian Pararan* (The New Haikazian Dictionary) prepared by the "Three Vartabeds," Fathers Gabriel Avedikian, Khachadur Surmelian, and Mgrdich Avkerian, begun in 1784 and completed in 1834, remains unsurpassed in its scholarship and scope. The Mekhitarist fathers also launched research in historical and archaeological fields. The leader was Father Mikayel Chamchian, whose epoch-making three-volume *Hayots Batmutiun* (History of the Armenians) was published in 1786, covering the entire history of the Armenian nation. The project used all available historical published and unpublished material from Greek and Roman sources, and it became the cornerstone of all historiography for a hundred years, influencing writers as well as historians. Another scholar of great merit was Father Ghugas Injijian, whose work on the archaeology, ethnography, and geography of ancient Armenia, published after his death, was of much help to later scholars. Other areas of interest have been theology, literature, and philology. The work of Father Gabriel Avedikian on Grigor Narekatsi (Gregory of Narek) was the starting point of much subsequent research on the medieval mystic. Avedikian also distinguished himself as a grammarian and patristic scholar.

By the mid-1800s the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire had been much weakened by constant struggle against Catholic penetration and by internal dissensions among different groups of the ruling elites. The urban masses, separated from the rest of the world and especially from the Turkish population, lived huddled around their church and their *amiras*. But the peasantry was worse off and barely survived the unbri-dled exploitation by Kurdish chieftains and Turkish overlords. All cultural life was thus the work of isolated and haphazard initiatives by *tbirs*, *badvelis*, priests, and *amiras*, who very slowly and painfully set up the infrastructure of the revival a century later. And when, in 1789, Sultan Selim allowed the *millets* to have their own parochial schools next to the churches, the *amiras* were quick to respond. Within five years, in Constantinople they had opened six schools, one hospital, and had founded a printing press.

Smyrna, with its compact, very conservative, prosperous Armenian community of around 10,000, was active too. Like Constantinople, it was a cosmopolitan city and an international port, open to all sorts of influences from the outside world. Armenian businessmen profited most from this reality. They also controlled the chamber of commerce as well as much of the local and international silk market. In 1759 a printing

press was active in the city, and a community hospital was built in 1802. Smyrna had the most imposing cathedral in the empire. The real glory of the community, the Mesrobian College, built in 1825 by the Abroyan family, was the first lay college in the entire empire. The school was free of charge, many foreign languages were taught, and European plays were staged—all for the first time in the Ottoman Empire. The principal, Father Hovnan Vanantetsi, a nationally renowned figure, was also one of the first to write poetry. It seems natural that the revival of the Western Armenians should start from such a cultured environment.

But the humiliating conditions of life of the Armenians, their inferior status in society, their isolation and insecurity, all resulted in an excessive reliance on the church, which, as the custodian of the culture, fostered their conservatism. During the reign of Sultan Mahmud (1808-1839), the situation of the minorities became somewhat more tolerable with the suppression of the frightful Janissaries and the tanzimat proclamation.

The Question of Western Armenian *Ashkharhabar*

By the nineteenth century Constantinople had become the spiritual and social center of the Armenians. It had a population of around 125,000, many of whom had come from the provinces, bringing their various dialects that carried strong Turkish influences. Thus the need for a common, efficient, and purified language became more pressing. To meet the challenge, the intellectual elite, made up of graduates from European universities, set to work. Garabed Utudjian, editor of *Masis*, the organ of the patriarchate; Nahabed Rusinian; Nigoghos Zorayan; Nigoghos Balian; and men of letters such as Krikor Odian and Minas Cheraz as well as Mekhitarist linguist Father Arsen Aydenian started the difficult task of forging a literary *ashkharhabar* from the popular vernacular. This effort was countered by pro-grabar intellectuals such as Father Madatia Karakash, Hagop Kurken, Reteos Berberian, and others who favored an *ashkharhabar* derived from grabar only. The "quarrel" lasted some 20 years, from 1860 to around 1880, and the *ashkharhabar* formed from the living language of the people was victorious. In the end, the founding of the journal *Hairenik* in 1891 by young writers Arpiar Arpiarian, Levon Pashalian, and Arshag Chobanian finally established the hegemony of the Western *ashkharhabar*.

A major breakthrough came with the publication in Smyrna in 1840 of the first periodical in literary *ashkharhabar*, *Arshaluis Araratian*

(Dawn of Ararat), edited by Ghugas Baltasarian. The periodical was a significant step toward modernization because of its high quality and its *ashkharhabar* language. The next important development was the activity of Stepan Vosganian (1825-1901), one of the great figures of the century. The first literary critic and all-around intellectual of the Western Armenians, Vosganian represents the prototype of a long line of Armenian intellectuals nurtured in and identified with European, and particularly French, culture. Educated in Paris, he became the champion of liberalism, of the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte, and took part in the French Revolution of 1848. Thus, Mesrobian College, under the leadership of Vosganian and others such as Krikor badveli Peshdimaldjian, Andreas Papazian, and Kevork badveli Chaprasdian, became a real powerhouse of erudite, dedicated, and Francophile teachers, translators, and journalists who influenced almost all aspects of literature.

Armenians have always had a passion for translation. In modern times, translating European literature into Armenian has served the triple purpose of enlightening the uneducated public, perfecting a literary language, and catching up with the civilized world. The Mekhitarists indulged in this passion fully, liking particularly the moral and didactic nature of much of the classical texts. Thus, between 1825 and 1850 Mekhitarist scholars translated some 130 volumes of European literature, including major works of Greek and Latin antiquity as well as scores of Italian and French classics and romances. Although almost all these translations were done in grabar, they nevertheless influenced the taste of the lay intelligentsia. Also, between 1816 and the 1850s some of the most widely read authors of European preromanticism were translated all over the Armenian world. The works of Edward Young, François Fénelon, Bernardin de Saint Pierre, and others satisfied a popular taste for melodramatic and exotic literature with religious and pastoral undertones. This taste persisted up to the end of the nineteenth century, influencing all the literary genres and even the lifestyles of the upper middle class in the big cities. When in 1852 the Dedayan brothers of Smyrna opened a press and a printing house and set up a team of expert translators, they found a ready market, especially in Constantinople, which they proceeded to flood not only with best-sellers of such authors as Alexandre Dumas (*files*), Eugène Sue, and Jules Verne but also with the works of major romantics including Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, Sir Walter Scott, and others. In the following forty years the Dedayan Press produced over 200 volumes of translations, an output second only to the achievement of the Mekhitarists. While this powerful

flow of preromantic and romantic translations was an important factor in shaping the nascent Armenian literature, to a certain extent it inhibited the natural growth of authentically national genres, especially in prose, a phenomenon generally associated with modernization efforts of emerging literatures in the nineteenth century. It also consolidated the hold of French cultural values on the Western Armenians. The massive translations by the Protestant missionaries of religious literature in an insipid, bland *ashkharhabar* also helped slightly to purify the language.

In the field of classical scholarship, further important work was done by the Mekhitarists of Vienna. This congregation had come into being in 1810 after a schismatic group of monks, breaking away from the mother congregation in Venice in 1773, had settled in Vienna. The congregation had become culturally active only after 1838. Influenced largely by the German academic atmosphere, it devoted its considerable energies to critical analyses of classical historians, to linguistics, and to archaeological research. Its main concern was the study and revival of the fifth-century grabar, the "Language of the Golden Age." The first important figure in this field was Father Ghevond Hovnanian (1817-1897), who conducted intense research into medieval Armenian and wrote a four-volume "Grammar of the Armenian Language," still unpublished. Another linguist was Father Hovsep Katerdjian (1820-1882), translator of Cicero, Xenophon, and Bossuet, and considered the founder of the literary school of the Vienna Mekhitarists. Author of a *Universal History* in four volumes (of which only two have been published [Katerdjian, 1849, 1852]), he is celebrated for the exquisite quality of his grabar. Another scholar of note was Father Madatia Karakashian (1818-1903), author of an important *Critical History of the Armenians* (1895). No less imposing was the figure of Father Hagovpos Dashian (1866-1933), an important contributor in the field of classical Armenian language and manuscript study, a translator and a co-author with Father Kerope Sbenian of a two-volume *Study of the Classical Armenian*. Perhaps the best-known scholar was Father Arsen Aydenian (1824-1902), whose *Critical Grammar of Ashkharhabar Modern Armenian Language* (1866) is considered an epoch-making achievement in the study of the Armenian language, its dialects, and its periods. His work has contributed perhaps more than that of any other Mekhitarist work to the establishment of the *ashkharhabar* as the literary language of modern times. The Mekhitarists of Vienna supplemented their books and research by starting the publication in 1887 of a scholarly journal called *Handes Amsorya* (Monthly Review), which continues to publish

valuable work in scholarship. The combined contribution of the two Mekhitarist congregations—the Venice branch specializing in scholarship and literature, the Vienna branch specializing in linguistic scholarship—has been enormous, especially in the nineteenth century, in studying and consolidating the Armenian language and medieval culture. The Mekhitarists also have been very important forces in disseminating nineteenth-century European ideological and cultural currents into Western Armenia. Additionally, they have been active in the field of education, opening schools, twenty-eight in all until World War I, all over the Armenian world, from Hungary in 1746 to France and Italy in 1918. In a word, they have been an indispensable factor in the revival of Armenian culture in modern times.

Western Armenian Romanticism

Western Armenian romanticism arrived and developed in two different centers almost at the same time—in the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice and in Constantinople. Its first signs appeared in Venice in the poetry of Father Ghevond Alishan (1820-1901), who published in 1857 and 1858 five small volumes of verse, two of which, *Bruni* (About Nature) and *Hairuni* (About Fatherland), throb with feverish love for nature and Armenia. His was a poetry of strong but restrained emotion, expressed in grabar and cast in the classical garb, rather bookish at times, but also, at others, breaking out in flights of liberated imagination. It was this love of nature, of fatherland, of religion and life that characterized Western Armenian romanticism for thirty years. An important component of Mekhitarist romanticism came from the European environment as the aftershocks of the 1848 February republican revolution in Paris and of French romanticism reached the shores of the Adriatic. The Mekhitarists were quick to act, as they thought of themselves as a relay station for transmitting the spirit of the political and literary revolutions of Europe to the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

In Constantinople, the situation had changed after 1858. The generation of university graduates of the 1840s had returned from France and had taken over many of the important posts in the community. In 1852 the journal *Hayastan*, organ of the patriarchate, had been changed to *Masis* and had become the most influential daily of the community under the editorship of Garabed Utudjian. In 1856 Harutiun Sevadgian (1831-1874), the rebel intellectual, began publishing

"Meghu," a voice of dissent new in Armenian life. The same year, Mgrdich Beshigtashlian (1828-1868) helped found the first permanent theater in Constantinople and started staging classical tragedies in *ashkharhabar* and dramas inspired from ancient Armenian history.

Beshigtashlian, a graduate of Muradian College in Padua, was the first major romantic poet of the West Armenians. Muradian was founded in 1834 by an Iranian-Armenian merchant and placed under Mekhitarist administration. Beshigtashlian formed part of the large group of West Armenian intellectuals educated in the Mekhitarist schools and in the spirit of European romanticism. He was very active socially and culturally in Constantinople, notably in the founding of the Western Armenian theater and of the Hamazkiats Association, the first serious organization for the advancement of learning through schools. In 1862, when the Zeitun rebellion erupted, his patriotic and passionate poems electrified the public, popularizing the romantic mood, and he became the first man to assert the moral authority of the writer in Armenian society. His tragic love affair with Srpouhi Vahanian, his early death from tuberculosis, and his melancholic and tender lyricism represent the first image of the romantic poet in Armenian popular imagination.

We find the same themes and style in the works of Beshigtashlian's contemporary, Bedros Turian (1852-1872). His historical plays, full of pathos and heroics, were mainly inspired from ancient Armenian history but had less impact than those of Beshigtashlian. The main themes of the few poems he wrote in his short life—love, solitude, nature, death—were all in the pure romantic Lamartinian tradition. Turian is unequaled in Armenian literature for the utter sincerity and purity of his talent, and his death from tuberculosis has endeared him to all Armenians, especially the young, who share best his desperate love of life. Today he has come to symbolize the prototype of the Armenian romantic poet—highly talented, very patriotic, poor and ungainly, unloved and unappreciated, fervently religious, and doomed to an untimely death.

The romantic period ended with Turian's death in 1872. It had lasted only fifteen years, leaving the stage to second-rate poets, journalists, sundry prose writers, and polemicists, until around 1885. This was a period of conflicts between, on the one hand, a rising middle class, Catholic clergy, and Protestant missionaries, and, on the other hand, the Apostolic Patriarchate allied to the *amiras* who ended up losing some of their prerogatives. The National Constitution (1860-1863) also helped curb *amira* power considerably, guaranteeing a democratic, lay participation in communal matters. At the same time, the non-Apostolic churches strengthened their positions and

weakened the power of the patriarchate. With the *amiras* split on many issues, especially school matters, the age-old racial hostility between Turks and Armenians heightened with the ascension to the throne in 1878 of the "Red Sultan," Abdul-Hamid II. One outstanding man of letters was Kevork badveli Peshdimaldjian, renowned teacher, apologist of the faith, lexicographer, and poet. The other was Garabed badveli Deroiyents-Chamurdjian, equally famous theologian and erudite ideologue of the true doctrine, editor, linguist, and author of 150 volumes of books, of which only five or six are known. Thus, despite the aggressiveness of the rising middle class, the mood of the mass of Armenians was conservative, attached to its institutions, and resigned to its fate.

During the 1870s and 1880s the creative imagination appeared exhausted, even though a certain momentum was kept alive thanks to the constant appeals by the press for unity, enlightenment, tolerance, and love among Armenians. During those arid decades, the dominant figure in the press and public eye was Madteos Mamurian (1830-1901) of Smyrna, editor of the literary and political weekly *Arevelian Mamul* (Oriental Press), which he founded in 1871. He was the most accomplished and informed intellectual of the times, European educated and a symbol of wisdom and stability. Mamurian cut the figure of a "master," and his periodical was the voice of moderation, although in one of his novels, *Sev Lerin Marde* (The Man of the Black Mountain), the hero, Zora, a freedom fighter, advocates armed resistance to the Russian oppressors. He was a serious social critic and an advocate of Westernization.

The year 1875 was an important one in Armenian intellectual history. By this time major elements of the cultural infrastructure (schools, cultural associations, printing presses, periodic press, churches, clubs, etc.) were in place, and the middle class was pretty well established in authority and imposed its utilitarian ideology. Also, some contacts had been made with the Eastern Armenians, and the provinces were showing the first signs of resistance to the oppressive regime. In literature, the literary Armenian was almost complete, there was a poetic tradition of sorts, and the prose had developed into different genres—the novel, the short story, the theater, and the satire.

Khachatur Abovian and His Generation

Eastern Armenian poetry was born with the work of Abovian, of the University of Dorpat. Of all the students at the university who wrote,

sang, or recited patriotic and nostalgic verses inspired by the homeland, its souvenirs, its suffering, and its beautiful nature, none had a greater impact on the times than Abovian. Before going to Dorpat, he had studied at the Nersisian Academy. A versatile talent, he tried his hand at almost all the genres—poetry, stories, essays, novels, plays, folklore—and was an innovator in many of them. His short career started in early youth with love lyrics inspired partly from popular poetry. During his Dorpat years, he fell under the influence of German romanticism, writing most of his inflamed and romantic poetry. He soon realized, however, that his public, the common people, needed to be educated and that the Armenian writer had to use the people's language in order to be understood. From then on, Abovian dedicated his life and work to enlightening the public. But his reformist activities soon brought him into sharp conflict with conservative elements and the clergy, causing him endless suffering. Armenian literature thereafter took on a social vocation, that is, it tried to appeal to the people, move their feelings, and direct their will. His masterpiece—*Verk Hayastani* (Wounds of Armenia), written in 1840 but published only in 1858—opened the new age. The novel was conceived and written more like a poem, so intense was its emotionality. It gave a graphic and tearful description of the tragic condition of Armenians in the countryside and in Erevan under Persian oppression; the hero, Aghasi, at the head of a band of partisans, fights against the overlords and for the liberation of Erevan, but dies in the end. He is thus the first rebel hero, the first “*fedai*” in Armenian literature, the prototype of the freedom fighter in Raffi's and Madteos Mamurian's novels. Abovian's novel and his patriotic poetry succeeded in placing the tragedy of Armenia and of the Armenians at the center of the enlightenment effort.

Contemporary to Abovian, Rafayel Patkanian (1830-1892) joined his voice to those trying to create a new literary Armenian that could be understood by the masses. He too was a liberal-minded reformist, and his short-lived journal *Ararat*, published in Tiflis from 1850 to 1852, gave full expression to this new spirit.

In the decade between 1850 and 1860, political themes started to appear in the journals, largely inspired by the Russian intellectual scene and by the ideologies of the radicals such as Mikhail Bakunin and Alexander Herzen. But the Armenians were most influenced by Visarion Belinsky's realist aesthetics, his social and political pragmatism, and, above all, his idealization of the “people,” glorified by the Populists. The center of this new literary activity was the small group of Armenian

students studying at the medical faculty of Moscow University. It was the continuation of the spirit of Dorpat students, and very soon some of the members of the group stood out as the most prominent playwrights, political activists, and journalists of the revival.

Another major literary event of those years was the publication of Stepan Nazarian's journal *Hiusisapail* (Aurora Borealis) in Moscow, in 1858, in close cooperation with Mikayel Nalbandian. Their common aim was the enlightenment and modernization of Armenian society, but whereas Nazarian favored a moderate approach to social change, Nalbandian was the prototype of the intellectual committed to radical and revolutionary change, to the democratization of Armenian society, and to the triumph of liberal ideals and the new *ashkharhabar*. Nazarian, an accomplished linguist, also championed the cause of *ashkharhabar*, advocating that it should be based on the dialect of the district of Ararat. Soon other young writers joined the team of *Hiusisapail*, which became the spearhead of the generation of reformers and revolutionaries. For six years Nazarian fought desperately to promote liberal education in Armenian schools, to open schools to train an enlightened clergy and a modern, lay intelligentsia, and to do away with intolerance and superstitions. He also translated scores of edifying, preromantic novels. He was the true personification of the spirit of Westernization and renewal.

Nalbandian led an agitated existence, harassed by both the tsarist authorities for his contacts with exiled Russian revolutionaries and by the Armenian establishment for his extreme liberal and reformist ideas. His literary production was scant but intense—his patriotic poems set to music were immensely popular, and he also wrote the first ethnographic novel in Armenian literature, *Minin Khoske, Miusin Harsn* (A Promise to One, A Bride to the Other), in 1857. A staunch champion of *ashkharhabar*, he believed that the function of the Armenian writer was to enlighten the Armenian people through a proper education in literary *ashkharhabar*. He was the first literary critic to formulate, in around 1865, the notion of a “national literature.”

Nalbandian's contribution to literary ideas included the theory of “realism” or “art as a mirror of reality,” a notion that covered, besides Abovian's *Verk Hayastani*, such works as Perj Proshian's *Sos ev Vartiter* (Sos and Vartiter), which he valued highly; Vartan Pasha's *Akabi* (published in Constantinople in 1851 in Armeno-Turkish, that is, Turkish words in Armenian characters); and others.

Another important enlightenment figure was Rafael Patkanian, a graduate of Lazarian College and Dorpat University. Like many of his

contemporaries, he was a linguist and a poet whose revolutionary lyrics, turned into music, inflamed the youth of his time from St. Petersburg to Tiflis. He too aimed at perfecting the vernacular. So, to pass from words to acts, he founded in 1854 the literary society known as "Kamar Katipa," whose purpose was to promote the use of the popular language for the expression of ethnic culture. Both he and Abovian shared the view that only through the creative literary work could *ashkharhabar* develop into an effective and elegant language. That was how Abovian's novel, coming after Patkanian nationalistic poetry and essays inspired by the daily life of the ordinary people, consecrated the triumph of the vernacular, which was the first condition for the success of the revival.

Smbat Shahaziz (1841-1901), the poet, was also caught up in the patriotic enthusiasm of his classmates in Lazarian College. His literary career was intimately tied to *Hiusisapail*, where he published most of his poetry. In 1865 appeared his most important work, *Levoni Vishte* (Leon's Lament). This long poem described the emotional experiences of an Armenian university student traveling from Moscow to Armenia. In it, the main character, Levon, laments the backwardness, servility, and moral degradation of his compatriots whom he meets in the cities en route. Levon vows to struggle and liberate his country from its chains and his people from its ills. Although the long poem owed much to Alexander Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin* and Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*, it was the first long poem in Armenian literature to have been inspired by the life of the people.

From 1860 to 1890 Eastern Armenian literature developed further the romantic, patriotic, and populist strains of its founders. New novelists gradually brought into focus the dominant literary style of descriptive, didactic, and socially oriented prose that has characterized the novels, the short stories, the plays, and even to some extent the poetry of the Eastern Armenians. It has been a literature of commitment to the welfare of the "people," to the land and traditions of the race, a mixture of romanticism and popular realism. Underlying it was a naive belief in progress and in the moral role of the writer that has lasted well into the Soviet era. Russian writers such as Nikolai Gogol, Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Chernyshevskii, and Pushkin above all were a constant source of liberal and populist inspiration for them.

The 1870s opened with the founding in 1872 in Tiflis of the periodical *Mshak* (Tiller) by Grigor Artsruni (1845-1892), a "Westernizer," one of the most accomplished and well-traveled intellectuals of his time. *Mshak* was the first major journal to appear in an

important Armenian urban community, and it became the outspoken champion of Westernization, European enlightenment, and liberalism. With these and other advanced ideas—on education, religious tolerance, and national liberation—Artsruni set his journal the task of continuing the momentum that Nazarian had generated with *Hiusisapail*. *Mshak* was published until the 1920s, remaining always in the forefront of the revival effort, of the intellectual struggle for a democratic and egalitarian society.

The Triumph of Romanticism

Artsruni also opened wide the pages of his journal to promising writers of his time, foremost among whom was Raffi, born as Hakob Melik-Hakobian (1835-1888), the most prolific and talented novelist of the nineteenth century. He authored a score of historical and ethnographic novels, stories, and sketches of city life whose main purpose was to depict the sorry plight of the Armenian rural population in the Ottoman Empire. He also aimed at inspiring in his compatriots a pride in their past and their historical heritage and at awakening in them the revolutionary spirit. Raffi's novels, written with fiery imagination, intense emotion, and fine observation of detail, constituted the centerpiece of the romantic fiction in Eastern Armenian literature. He is rightly considered the ideological father of the Armenian revolutionary movements that started in the middle of the 1880s. One of his heroes in particular, Vardan, in the novel *Khente* (The Madman), symbolized for generations to come the figure of the Armenian freedom fighter.

Raffi's work was the most successful application of the ideas of enlightenment and political awakening. Other novelists concentrated mainly on criticism of society's ills, all the while remaining within the realm of mild realism and sentimentalism so dear to the public. One such novelist was Perj Proshian (1837-1907), whose *Sos ev Vartiter* followed closely the model of *Verk Hayastani*. He also published several ethnographical novels, reinforcing the general trend set by Abovian's slogan "Literature for the people and about the people." But when literature draws very close to life, especially country life, whose picturesque appealed so much to city people, the need for imagination and the attention to style seem to lessen. Both *Mshak* and another conservative journal, *Meghu Hayastani* (Bee of Armenia) (1858-1886), supported this pragmatic aesthetic, which was a major cause in the gradual decline of poetry after 1885. Another secondary writer of those years was

Ghazaros Aghayants (1840-1911), whose novels of rustic inspiration were very popular.

Eastern Armenian literature had by now a history of some thirty-five years. During this time a literary Armenian had been formed, based on the dialect of the plain of Ararat, and a semblance of tradition had come to life in prose and in journalism, both heavily influenced by foreign cultures. But poetry had lagged behind, and there were still no major literary historians, no literary critics, no linguists, and no great translators. The theater had matured. Early patriotic and sentimental plays by students at Moscow University in the late 1850s and in Tiflis during the 1860s and comedies in the local dialect were crude beginnings of a genre whose first major representative was Gabriel Sundukian (1825-1912). His work heralded the coming of the realist theater in Eastern Armenian literature around the years 1870-1880. A student of Abovian's, Sundukian also studied at St. Petersburg and was influenced by Belinskii's theories about the moral function of the theater. Sundukian's plays exposed the evils and ills of emergent capitalism in the Caucasus. In his comedies and melodramas, especially *Bebo* (1871), written in the dialect of Tiflis, he derided the corruption in the Armenian middle class, the superstitions of the lower classes, and their exploitation by the bureaucracy of Tiflis. His influence on future generations of playwrights has been great, and his plays still attract a large public. By the middle of the 1880s, Eastern Armenian literature had established contacts, through *Mshak*, with Western Armenian literary circles (mainly in the journal *Arevelk* of Arpiar Arpiarian, appearing in Constantinople), thus broadening its field of interest and action. In 1882 the new liberal newspaper *Ardzagang* (Echo) of Abgar Hovhannisian came to join *Mshak* in its crusade of modernization, followed in 1888 by Mkrtich Barkhudarian's *Handes Grakanakan ev Patmakan* (Review of Literature and History) from Moscow. Then in 1889 it was the *Murj* (Hammer) of Avetik Aratskhanians followed by Father Giut Aghanian's *Luma* in 1896. The 1880s was the scene of a bitter polemic between two groups of intellectuals polarized around the journals *Mshak* and *Meghu Hayastani*, followed later by *Nor Dar* (New Century). *Mshak*, progressive and liberal, was the champion of Westernization, which was fiercely opposed by the latter two conservative and regressive journals. In the 1890s this feud turned sour, and bitter invectives were often exchanged. In any case, it was in these journals that the main characteristics of Eastern Armenian literature—its sense of the rural culture

and of the common man, its utilitarian, didactic, and prose-oriented nature—found their best expression.

All major novelists and prose writers so far had worked within the romantic tradition established by Abovian and Raffi, but by the 1890s a more realistic aesthetic had begun to tempt one of the more talented writers, Alexandr Shirvanzade (1858-1935). He had started his career in *Mshak* and soon asserted his talent as the novelist of the disinherited classes of society. More than any other writer of his time, he had a firsthand knowledge of the ugly side of life, from tsarist jail to the oil fields of Baku. He continued the realist tradition of Sundukian, and his novels, especially his best-known one, *Kaos* (Chaos, 1896), depicted the drama of a dying rural society, the birth of an industrial proletariat, and the iniquities of a rising bourgeoisie. His twenty-six novels and novellas constitute an ambitious project of capturing the spirit and reality of an entire epoch, from 1879 to the coming of the revolutionary times, in 1900. After 1900 Shirvanzade turned to the theater, pursuing the same themes of social criticism.

Avetis Aharonian (1866-1948), called the “Bard of Armenian Grief,” was another prolific novelist and story writer who drew his inspiration from the immense tragedy and heroism of recent Armenian historical experience as well as from Armenian village life, native traditions, and domestic dramas. He was a master of style and his colorful, romantic imagination, together with his powerful sense of reality, made him unique in Eastern Armenian letters. “The true novelist,” he says, “is first of all a poet, a visionary and a prophet, and the seat of divine inspiration.”

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Eastern Armenian literature entered a new phase with the coming of the poet Hovhannes Hovhannisian (1864-1929). His passionate love of nature and of suffering mankind, his tender lyricism and limpid verse were new in Armenian poetry and thus prepared ground for the emergence of three major poets who changed and vitalized the entire poetic scene—Hovhannes Tumanian (1869-1923), Avetik Isahakian (1875-1957), and Vahan Terian (1885-1920). With these new and talented poets there appeared also, at the turn of the century, a group of literary critics who helped initiate a serious discourse on the nature and purpose of literature. With Tumanian, a breath of poetry swept into the popular legends, epic tales, and ballads, an inimitable style that raised the ordinary folktale into the realm of art. Above and beyond realism or romanticism, Tumanian’s art created a genre of its own, where popular wisdom, sense of beauty, and

love of simple country life are combined. For the first time in Armenian culture, a poet became the voice of the national conscience and the symbol of national unity. Tumanian was one of the few intellectuals in Eastern Armenia who organized urgent help for the Western Armenians fleeing from the Turkish genocide of 1915. Isahakian also touched a very sensitive popular vein in his folk poetry as well as the more universal theme of love. In 1897 his first volume of poetry, *Erger ou Verker* (Songs and Wounds), appeared. His work captures the simple yet powerful emotions and deep humanity of the Armenian peasant folk through legends, lyrical and epic poems, short stories, and his own epic novel *Usta Karo* (1925). His poetic versatility, his travels, and his extensive connections outside Armenia earned him the title "master." But perhaps the most gifted and private poet of all Eastern Armenian literature was Terian, who embraced communism in 1917 and was active in various advisory functions. In his collection of poems *Mtnshaghi Andurdje* (Twilight Daydreams) in 1908, Terian exhibited a talent that excelled in capturing the fleeting sensations, the feelings of sadness, loneliness, and profound despair at the hopelessness and void of human existence. Later on his poetry developed the themes of an ideal patriotism and a craving to escape from life into dreamland and an utopian world. The "Poet of Melancholy," he is the most "Western" of all Eastern Armenian poets and is almost an anomaly in a culture where public and private domains are not clearly differentiated.

By the time the Russian revolution exploded in 1917, Eastern Armenians could claim, after a century of evolution and struggles, to have a well-formed literary language, a sense of professionalism and of national traditions in prose, and, in particular, the novel. In poetry, too, Tumanian and Terian were certainly nationally known and held great promise for the future.

Western Armenian Prose

The earliest forms of the novel were almost copies of the French and English preromantic fiction that had been translated in the early 1850s. These novels of Hovhannes Hisarian (1827-1906) and Armenag Haiguni (1835-1866), published in the 1850s and 1860s, were mainly exotic and sentimental works so popular in Europe in the early part of the century. So were the score of pseudonovels and novels written until the end of the 1870s. Only in 1878 did a novelist, Hovsep Shishmanian, or Dzerents

(1822-1888), appear on the scene with three historical novels, intending to mobilize Armenian political power for the struggle to liberate Western Armenia or at least Cilicia. These novels, largely inspired by Sir Walter Scott, were a great success with the public for their colorful details and heroic scenes, but do not rank as historical novels in the true sense of the word. Another novelist of the 1880s was Srpouhi Dussap (1842-1901), whose novels were constructed around feminist themes of emancipation of the woman and her rights and again inspired by European and French romantic literatures. Dussap did not lack talent and an understanding of human nature, but the violent controversy aroused by the themes in a still-conservative and traditionalist society such as Armenia distracted attention from the merits of her work.

The short story was the genre best suited to a society newly awakened to modern literatures and where the vehicle best fitted for literary expression was the newspaper. Here again, the model was taken from French literature, but the hundreds of stories published in the press were closer to life's reality than was the case with the novels. But the genre had to wait until the 1890s for the coming of a real master.

Satirical literature has always been popular with Armenians, perhaps because it is the only way a victim can retaliate in an oppressed society. Started in 1856 by Harutiun Sevadjan (1831-1874) in his journal *Meghu*, the genre was perfected in the 1870s and 1880s by Hagop Baronian (1841-1892), a writer combining a generous soul with a scathing satirical verve and a refined sense of humor. Baronian remains to this day the uncontested master of the genre, and his hilarious plays, especially *Baghdasar Aghbar* (Brother Baghdasar) and *Metsapativ Muratskanner* (Honorable Beggars) are still very popular with Armenian audiences. His social satire, in his prose texts, is also very much alive today and is a mine of information about life a century ago in the Ottoman Empire. Although influenced by Molière's art, Baronian's plays, sketches, and descriptions of urban life with its picturesque throng of characters carried an ethnic stamp that was missing elsewhere. Sevadjan, Baronian, and many other satirists laid the basis of the "realist" school that was to flourish from the late 1880s to the end of the century.

The periodic press has always been a vital component of Western Armenian literature, and perhaps three-quarters of all published texts have first appeared in its pages. It has proved to be the easiest if not the best way of enlightenment, of communication and bonding between the far-flung communities. Almost every writer has either edited or published a newspaper or formed part of an editorial body. During the

nineteenth century and while in the throes of awakening, the Armenians managed to publish some 300 periodicals.

The 1880s were remarkable from many points. The Treaty of Berlin in 1878 had internationalized the Armenian question but had also cast fears in the sultan's heart of foreign intervention and Armenian secession from the empire. As a result, in the early 1880s repression in the provinces had increased, obliging Armenians to form secret political societies and parties in order to defend themselves and to fight back. This only escalated the repression, resulting in increased misery and bloodshed. Soon the newspapers in Constantinople were flooded with horror stories from the Armenian provinces. The reports suddenly awakened the Armenians to the brutal reality at their doorsteps.

Western Armenian Realist School

Thus, a breath of reality had blown across the minds and had swept away some of the latent romanticism and the habit of escape from the painful reality into a dream world or into prayer. One last romantic however lingered on, Eghia Dermirdjibashian (1851-1908), a poet with mystical leanings, an eclectic mind nourished by Goethe, Hugo, Auguste Comte, and positivist philosophy. He called out for a renewal of Armenian culture through Eastern sources of inspiration. But times were changing; men with nerves of steel and a sense of action were needed. One such man was Arpiar Arpiarian (1852-1908)—writer, intellectual, journalist, political and cultural activist. In 1884 he founded the journal *Arevelk* (The Orient) to nurture a new generation of realist writers and intellectuals and also established cultural contacts through Artsruni's *Mshak* with the Eastern Armenians. He engaged in political activity to awaken his compatriots to the need to unite and face the Turkish menace of extermination, which he felt coming, sooner or later. Arpiarian was a passionate and prolific writer but only a few of his longer stories are known to the public at large, especially one novella, *Karmir Zhamuts* (The Red Offering), which is a powerful story of class conflict that ends with a plea for national reconciliation. He traveled a great deal, writing, publishing, lecturing, organizing. Soon his efforts bore fruit and a new generation of "realists" entered the literary scene.

Many of the new wave of writers were destined to perish in the 1915 catastrophe. Among them were some of the most brilliant minds of Armenian literature, the fruit of 150 years of unrelenting effort. The

first name to appear in print in 1887 was that of Krikor Zohrab (1861-1915), the quintessential product of Western Armenian social evolution. After the failure of his novel *Anhetatsats Serund Me* (A Vanished Generation), he turned to the short story, whose format suited him admirably. Lawyer and celebrated orator, political figure, engineer, writer, man of the world, he produced the most accomplished short stories of domestic dramas and character studies in Armenian, which capture many dramatic aspects of the life of the affluent Armenian society in Constantinople. His themes range from the war of the sexes and class exploitation to moral and social alienation in big cities, to love and its aberrations. Zohrab stands well above his contemporaries in the depth and breadth of his understanding of life and human nature, especially that of women. This "Prince of the Short Story," as he was known, died in the 1915 genocide. In 1888 appeared one of the important novels of the nineteenth century, Dikran Gamsaragan's (1866-1940) *Varzhapetin Aghchike* (The Teacher's Daughter), a tale of sin and love that tried to lay bare the bigotry of the Constantinople middle class private and social life, the immorality hidden behind the respectability as well as the conflict of social classes. It was the first work of a totally unknown young man of twenty, a novel written as a document about the manners of his day. The novel marked the triumph of the new spirit of realism that the journal *Arevelk* had begun.

The period 1885 to 1915 was filled with a number of popular novelists whose rather coarse works catered mainly to the crowd. In fact, these popular novels have had the longest and most stable tradition, beginning in the early years of the 1850s, at the start of Western Armenian novel, and continuing right up the present. However, they have had no impact on the evolution of the genre. The last realist novel of the nineteenth century was Erukhan's (Ervant Sermakeshkhian) (1870-1915) *Amirain Aghchige* (The Amira's Daughter), published in 1905 under the title *Merzhvats Ser* (Rejected Love). Like Gamsaragan's quasi-realistic novel, this work details certain aspects of the private life of the upper and lower classes in Constantinople at the turn of the century, centered on the emotional and economic abuse of the poor by the rich but leaving more disturbing facts unsaid. It is a "class novel" in that the author and the heroes are constantly conscious of their position in society and can never liberate themselves from their value systems. It suffers from, among other things, the author's inability to be objective and to avoid taking sides in the conflicts in the novel, a shortcoming typical of the vast majority of writers. The realist trend in Western

Armenian literature continues mainly in the short story, gradually giving shape to a certain Armenian variant of the realist aesthetic. Armenian realism presents a reality cleaned of its sharply immoral and shocking aspects, has didactic aims, and never questions the social hierarchies.

An important figure of the epoch was Arshag Chobanian (1872-1954), publicist, translator, and literary critic of great versatility who was very active in acquainting the French public with the treasures of Armenian medieval poetry. He was also a poet, an essayist, a scholar, and the founder-editor of one of the most serious Armenian literary journals, *Anahid*. A writer of considerable renown was the satirical novelist Ervant Odian (1869-1926), a prolific writer and publicist who is remembered today mainly through his epistolary novel *Unker Panchuni* (Comrade Panchuni) (1910), which satirizes the activities and ideology of Eastern Armenian socialist revolutionaries come to politicize the Western Armenian country folk. Finally, in 1910, Rupen Zartarian (1874-1915), a gifted prose writer from the provinces, published a collection of brilliant short stories and popular legends *Tsaigaluis* (Nocturnal Light), highlighting the beauty of the countryside and the wisdom of the simple peasants.

Around the turn of the century, these new genres coincided with an upsurge of literary activity in the provinces that continued the momentum of Mgrdich Khrimian and of Father Karekin Srvantsdians's ethnographic work on Armenian traditions and his transcription of the popular epic "David of Sassun" in 1874. Two writers, Melkon Gurdjian, or Hrant (1859-1915), and Tlgadintsi (Hovhannes Harutiunian) (1860-1915), now turned their attention to the life of the country folk. Gurdjian focused interest on the suffering of the migrant workers from the countryside living in utter misery in the slums around Constantinople, describing in the dialect of the victims their hopes and pains. Tlgadintsi gave an emotional picture of everyday life in the provinces, the simply healthy ethic of the villager as well as his defects and foibles. This was truly the literature of the Armenian heartland.

All this contrasted sharply with the cosmopolitan and refined lifestyle of the Armenians living in big cities. Writers from the countryside moved to reject city literature as a reflection of a "corrupt" life and pitted themselves against the "Bolsetsi," or Constantinople intelligentsia. This "return to the racial sources" had hardly taken shape when a new movement, this time from the city, sprang up. The work of a group of very talented young poets and prose writers who had entered the literary scene between 1900 and 1910, with a totally fresh

source of inspiration, a generation with a new vision of life and art, was probably an expression of the spiritual energies that the intense repression of the Turkish regime had sublimated in them. It was destined to be the last phase of Western Armenian literature, labeled "the literature of artists" by critics.

Renewal in Western Armenian Poetry

This renewal started in 1901 with a poet of great talent, Vahan Tekeyan (1878-1945). He introduced a poetry of a rather cerebral nature with a very refined sense of style that was new in Armenian poetry. The serene, measured verses of a twenty-three-year-old youth held great promise for the future. Tekeyan was to reveal the full measure of his talent after the massacres. In 1901 the first play by the most accomplished Armenian playwright, Levon Shant (1869-1951), appeared. Shant brought into Armenian theater some of the concerns of European thought: the themes of the conflict between idealism and sensualism, between the individual's destiny and the interests of society, and the emancipation of the self from the shackles of the body. Very often Shant took his subjects from Armenian history. One of the distinctive features of his theater was the use of poetry, mythology, metaphysics, allegory, symbolism, music, and elaborate stage scenery to mask the brutal sides of human nature and convey the often-complex metaphysical message. But this is a theater of essentially moral issues, of passions unleashed between strong personalities, in *Hin Astvatsner* (Antique Gods) (1909), *Kaisre* (The Emperor) (1916), and *Shghtaivatse* (The Enchained) (1918). Shant began his career as a poet and novelist concerned mainly with social issues such as superstitions, women's freedom, and the rights of the elite. Adom Yardjanian (Siamanto) (1878-1915) was remarkable for the violence and power of his verse and the freedom of his imagination. The epic breath blowing through his lines gave enormous power to the language and helped to revitalize the morale of the Armenians and enable them to resist the Turkish moral aggression, after the bloody massacres of 1894 to 1896. His books *Diutsaznoren* (In the Epic Manner) (1901), *Hogevarki ev Huisi Jaher* (Torches of Agony and Hope) (1907), and *Karmir Lurer Barekames* (Red News from My Friend) (1909) are all testaments of revolt and heroism. In his poetry the Armenian language attained its most powerful expression. Although his

output was meager, his writing voices the Armenian nation's outrage against man's inhumanity to man.

In 1906 Misak Medsarents (1886-1908) asserted his intense yet refined experience of beauty through poetry as the way to truth and survival. Medsarents had a totally individual and lyrical temperament intoxicated with sounds, smells, and pure sensations, a creature of nature destined to die very young, the equivalent of John Keats in Armenian poetry. His two collections of poems, *Dziadzan* (The Rainbow) and *Nor Tagher* (New Lyrics), both published in 1907, inspired by the Armenian countryside and the popular culture, have immortalized the most exquisite qualities of Western Armenian lyrical sensibility. In the same year appeared *Sarsurner* (Shudders), the first volume of the most talented Armenian poet, Taniel Varoujan (1884-1915). A man of great vitality of spirit, his poetry was a synthesis of controlled, sensual classical beauty and of romantic emotion and imagination. His art revived the virile powers of the language and exalted the hidden energies of the race. He was the driving force behind the revival of pagan Armenian culture in 1914 and of a movement to revitalize the creative force of the nation by an appeal to instinctual, racial virtues, a movement that gave birth to the avant-garde journal *Mehian* in 1914. His important books were *Tseghin Sirte* (The Heart of the Race) (1909), wherein he exalted the virtues of the Armenian nation, and the *Hetanos Erger* (Pagan Songs) (1912), which sang the glory of pagan energy, beauty, and love. In the last collection of his verse, entitled *Hatsin Erge* (The Song of Bread) and salvaged by friends and published posthumously in 1921, Varoujan glorified the virtues of the peasant's life and spirit. In 1906 Diran Chrakian, or Indra (1875-1921), entered the literary scene with his highly original, mystifying introspective prose book *Nerashkhar* (Inner World), a kind of metaphysical exploration into the world of subtle meanings and intuitive truths, a surreal statement about the essence of language and reality that at times went into the realms of Far Eastern esoterical wisdom. Chrakian's world of mystical flights has not yet been fully explored. He also published a collection of poems called *Nojastan* (The Cypress Grove) (1908), where his brooding imagination fixed itself on God and death. The year 1907 saw the arrival of a prose writer, Zabel Yesayan (1878-1943), an accomplished stylist formed in the European artistic milieu and gifted with a broad understanding of human nature and who, later in life, was to become one of the best novelists of modern Armenian literature.

The impact of such a concentration of gifted artists was slow to develop because of the severe censorship that had been instituted in 1898 and also because as a result of the widespread massacres of 1894 to 1896 in the provinces, a large segment of the political and literary intelligentsia had fled to Europe, in particular Paris. From there they continued to wage ideological war against the sultan's government. Part of this émigré community returned to Turkey upon the downfall of the sultan in 1908. From then until 1915 the talents of the new generation blossomed and developed their aesthetic ideals. Other budding writers included Hagop Oshagan (1883-1948), the critic and short story writer who later was to become the greatest and most prolific novelist and critic in Western Armenian letters, and Gosdan Zarian (1885-1969), the cosmopolitan writer and novelist. These men and others supported the new movement and the journal *Mehian* (1914), which served as a forum for the formulation of their ideas. Most of these talented and promising men were caught in the genocide seven years later and perished, with around 200 other intellectuals.

The final chapter of the Western Armenian literature covers the four years following the World War I Armistice of 1918, when the remnants of the once-glorious Armenian literati flocked to Constantinople from exile to restart their cultural life. In a short, dramatic effort, the Armenians tried to get back on their feet with a sudden burst of creativity and feverish cultural activity in the city full of horror stories and morbid memories of butchered friends and relatives. But that revival came to an abrupt end with the triumphant return of Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) to the capital in 1922.

The 1920s ushered in a new era in the long and tragic history of Armenian culture, with the onset of communism in Armenia in the east and the birth of the diaspora in the Western Armenian world.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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